



Transforming
Children's Care

GLOBAL COLLABORATIVE PLATFORM

**WEBINAR #14: Foster
Care for Children on
the Move: The
Gambia Experience**

21 June 2023

This webinar
will begin
momentarily.





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WEBINAR #14: Foster Care for Children on the Move: The Gambia Experience

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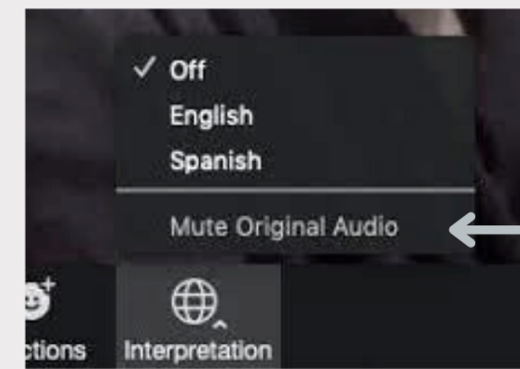


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1. En los controles, presione la opción **Interpretación**.

2. Haga clic en el idioma que desee escuchar.



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WELCOME

- This webinar is hosted by the Transforming Children's Care Global Collaborative Platform
- The platform establishes more strategic sector-wide collaboration from global to local levels to strengthen children's care and care systems
- Sign up at the link in the chat to join the platform and receive updates about future webinars

HOUSEKEEPING

- Introduce yourself in the chat (select “everyone” when sending a message so everyone can see it)
- This webinar is being recorded and the recording will be made available to you in Spanish, French and English.
- Remember to select the interpretation
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OPPORTUNITY TO JOIN THE TASK FORCE ON FOSTER CARE

The **Task Force on Foster Care** has been established to provide a platform for sharing and learning on foster care practice experiences from different contexts across the globe.

We encourage and welcome people with lived experience of foster care, foster carers, practitioners, Government actors, and those interested in sharing their experience of the implementation of foster care services to join the Task Force.

If you are interested in joining the Task Force, please sign up to the Transforming Children's Care Global Collaborative Platform and request to join the 'Foster Care Group'.

<https://www.transformcare4children.org/user/register>

MODERATOR

Geoffrey Oyat

Regional Child Protection Advisor East &
Southern Africa & Co-Lead Safe & Appropriate
Care Technical Working Group

Save the Children

AGENDA

- Welcome
- Background of the PROTEJEM project and lessons learned
- Implementing foster care as an alternative to CCIs in The Gambia
- Q&A

PRESENTER

José María Reyes Benítez

Child Protection Technical Advisor

Save the Children - Spain



Foster Care for Children on the Move: The Gambia Experience

As an alternative to the Government Shelter, Save the Children and Terre des hommes have implemented the **“Improving the protection of children and youth in mobility on the main migratory routes in West Africa”** financed by the European Union Trust Fund for Emergency for Africa.



21st June 2023

OUTLINE

1. Background

2. Context: The Gambia

3. Approach

4. A Case Study in The Gambia. The Use of Mobile Phones By Foster Children

5. Conclusions

6. Recommendations



BACKGROUND

Children's mobility in West Africa is driven by multiple factors including economic reasons, education, social context, family environment and domestic violence, conflict, climate change or food insecurity.

The objective of the **PROTEJEM** project is to contribute to the creation of a protective environment for children and youth on the move in **Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Senegal and The Gambia**, and to facilitate their access to quality social services adapted to their needs and according to their vulnerabilities.

This project started on 15th of January 2020 and ended on 14th of January 2023 (with an extension until 14 July 2023). Since 2020, the project in The Gambia has offered **direct assistance to 721 children and youth on the move** and **251** of these children **were placed in foster care families** and later reintegrated into their families in The Gambia and neighbouring countries.



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Specialised Foster Care for Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) in Serbia

In the Balkans, Save the Children has been present since the beginning of the refugee crisis in 2015. They conduct activities **to ensure that local child protection systems provide quality child-centred services to UASC**, as well as provide alternatives to detention or closed facilities for unaccompanied and separated children.

In 2017, refugee responses in Serbia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Croatia were transformed into **Balkans Migration and Displacement Centre**, with the mandate to improve learning and knowledge-sharing about adequate responses to children in migration.

This guidance has been formulated to enable a smoother transition into foster care for UASC, and to help them overcome challenges of living with families of different cultures and languages.



LESSONS LEARNED

We should **target a specific age group of refugee and migrant children** for recommending placement to foster care, and foster care for adolescents who were exposed to traumatic experiences and whose mental health has deteriorated, would require additional training and individual support to foster families and children.

Foster families and children require **continuous support** to be able to deal with the difficult experiences children have been through, and to support their path to recovery.

Knowing some characteristic like **understanding cultural patterns** for reacting to such events, are valuable tools to be able to recognize the need for support and help children in the most appropriate way to garner their acceptance. It is also necessary to have **the skills to gradually enable the child**, through daily care, to regain trust in him/herself and the world in which he/she lives.

The **network of professionals** and foster families should be further strengthened to become more effective in timely coordination, monitoring, referrals and support, including timely **identification** of UASC in need of foster care, **selecting foster families**, conducting best interest assessments, preparing, monitoring and supporting children and foster families.

Explaining foster care to UASC is crucial for their **acceptance of placement**. UASC, particularly the older ones, are often unfamiliar with and sceptical towards the concept of foster care.

VIDEO

PRESENTER

Alieu Marr

Project Officer - Improving the protection of Children and Youth in Mobility along main migration routes of West Africa

Save the Children

CONTEXT: THE GAMBIA

The Gambia is a source, transit, and destination country for child trafficking for sexual purposes, as well as labour exploitation. Significant number of children on the move are boys who have attended Koranic schools and girls who attempt to escape gender-based violence, including child marriage.

The PROTEJEM project team developed alongside the Gambian Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare the country's first alternative care protocol which stipulates the steps of care to children placed in foster families.

This protocol is based on a series of key principles such as non-discrimination, confidentiality, responsibility, and transparency. The protocol also relies on promoting a meaningful and safe participation of the child at every stage of the care process.

The project has been implemented in two areas: Farafenni (North Bank Region) and Soma (Lower River Region). Foster families are a solution for the temporary placement of children and young migrants while the procedures for their reintegration in their families and communities of origin are underway.

Step 1 - Preparing the path and Care Protocol with authorities:

- ❑ Involvement of institutional stakeholders, through meetings such as with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare, leading to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding. Similar meetings were held with other institutional actors such as the Ministry of the Interior, National Agency Against Trafficking in Persons etc, as well as with community actors.
- ❑ Development of a Care Protocol – the Protocol contains guiding principles (Best Interests of the Child, Non-discrimination, Confidentiality, Child Participation, Do No Harm...), and key conditions / steps for placement.

Step 2 – Identification of host families with and within the communities:

- ❑ Introductory meetings with the community representatives for the preliminary identification of interested families.

Step 3 – Selection, assessment and screening of foster families:

1. The **assessment of the identified families** was led by Save the Children in collaboration with the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) and the Community. The assessment included physical inspection of accommodation and other facilities and the overall home environment, children’s routine activities, access to basic social services, etc.
2. To **confirm that potential foster families** had no criminal background, especially in working or dealing with children, 3 reference checks were conducted at community level for each family. The referees were identified by the foster families themselves. This was followed by police background checks of each family and the issuance of a Certificate of Character to each.
3. Applications for **clearance of the Foster Families** were sent to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare with the support of the Regional Social Welfare Officers based at the respective Project locations. Once endorsed by the Ministry, placement services began.

APPROACH

Step 4 – Training and support of foster families:

1. Once the Ministry gave clearance, Foster Families were introduced to the communities for people to understand their exact role.
2. One key step was the training of the foster families to prepare them for placement of children. Participation in the training on Child Safeguarding provided by Save the Children enabled them improve their capacities on the needs and specificities of children and youth on the move.
3. Each family was provided with an initial assistance of food items and bedding materials like mattresses, bed sheets, and pillows. Subsequently, in every 2 months, the Project supports the families with food items in the form of rice, cooking oil, sugar, etc. to improve their capacity in caring for children.

APPROACH

Step 5 – Placement of children and follow-up: Placement finally began when SCI obtained clearance from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare for the operationalisation of the Foster Families in coordination with several stakeholders:

❑ **Department of Social Welfare-**



❑ **The Child Friendly Space (CFS)**
- managed by COOPI in Farafenni-



❑ CEDAG (National Organisation and a subsidiary of the West African Network in The Gambia).



THE USE OF MOBILE PHONES BY FOSTER CHILDREN: A CASE STUDY IN THE GAMBIA

- ❑ To ensure accountability and transparency, mobile phones were given to each Foster Family for use by children under placement.
- ❑ The use of mobile phones has been one of the provided mechanisms for risk management, in combination with the interviews held during monitoring activities, which also include on-the-spot checks as well as suggestion boxes.

THE METHODOLOGY USED IN THE CASE STUDY

- ❑ A survey was conducted with a focus groups of migrant children staying in Foster Families, as well as with the Save the Children team involved in the project and the Foster Families to gauge the effectiveness of the phones.
- ❑ Save the Children and DSW are organising monitoring visits in order to ensure full respect of children's rights and well-being. Follow up is regularly conducted to evaluate and ascertain the adequacy of the foster care

MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS AND SUCCESSES

- (1) The children and youth may make a direct call to the team.
- (2) The team submits comments and recommendations to the foster family, which in turn generates greater protection and better attention for the children and youth placed under their care.
- (3) The team also analyses the calls, observing the children's behaviour, attitude, and well-being, and then drafts reports in order to prevent any problems affecting the children and youth on the move and to ensure they are being protected.

Caregivers/Foster families: The caregivers use the cell phone to speak with the project team and to report any problem affecting the children under their care. In addition, the cell phones are used as entertainment for the children as well as a channel to keep them in touch with their parents.



CONCLUSIONS

- ❑ **8 families were trained and recognised as foster families** in both project zones, Farafenni and Soma. Out of the 8 families selected, 5 are male-headed and 3 female-headed. **251 children** up to 25 years old were hosted between February 2021 and March 2023.
- ❑ **A formal protocol** in order to define clear roles, responsibilities for each stakeholder, and ensure coordination between communities and institutions is in place as well as a referral pathway.

**A concrete
answer**

**A coordinated
answer.**

**Community
members.**

**Family-based
care.**



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RECOMMENDATIONS

? **Related to communities' involvement:**

- Presenting the project as based on community practices is a key for better acceptance.
- Considering geographic balance in the choice of families.
- Ensuring regular trainings and sensitisation for foster families and communities.

? **Related to the involvement of institutional stakeholders:**

- Coordination between DSW social workers, CCPC members, NGOs, health services and other stakeholders.
- Existing Protocol and tools- SOP (Standard Operating Procedures) for Protection and Assistance of Migrant Children in the Gambia, or existing global guidelines on alternative care.

? **Related to the care of children within foster families:**

- Integrated within communities & regular physical monitoring.
- Foster families' members should not replace or be seen as social workers.



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THANK YOU



Foster Care for Children on the Move: The Gambia Experience

21st June 2023



Q&A



**THANK YOU
FOR JOINING!**

Please see the chat box for a link to learn more about the [Transforming Children's Care Global Collaborative Platform](#) and find out how to join.

We will be sending you a link to the resources shared, webinar recording and slides in a follow-up email shortly. If you have questions, comments or recommendations for future webinar topics, please send them to:

contact@transformcare4children.org